

The First Days Of Spring

by stuckwith-harry

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Summary: "A pang of despair twinges in his stomach, but he shoos it away and resides to the only comfort he knows: He turns on every light in the damn house, boils a fresh kettle of tea, and sits with Harry until they fall asleep over half-empty mugs." Alternatively titled The One Where Kat Cries (hopefully) And Ron And Harry Die From Tea Poisoning.

The First Days Of Spring

****One.****

Really too late to call so we wait for

Morning to wake you it's all we got

- Band of Horses

Someone is talking to him.

"... you okay, mate?"

That voice.

Harry is sure he's heard it before. It's warm, and soothing â€" it reminds him of a comforting pat on the back when you're about to leave, a casual "It'll be all right" that slips off someone's lips in between sentences. It's a gentle kind of comfort â€" one that miraculously manages to ease the pain in his chest.

He should turn around, he thinks, and reply. At the very least, he should reply.

He's so â€|

Tired.

"I'll check on you later."

Harry can hear the soft thud of a closing door.

He's alone.

* * *

><p>Harry hasn't counted the days, but Ron has, and it's taken his friend three days to get out of bed.<p>

"You look terrible."

That's not a lie, but it's not the truth, either. Harry does look terrible, but Ron is used to that - he realises with a dull pang in his stomach just how much " he's used to the traces that grief and fear and a lifetime of trouble have left on Harry's face. (If he were honest, he'd admit he doesn't remember the last time he's seen Harry laugh, or the way his eyes used to light up every time he did. Maybe that's part of the lie as well.)

The truth is that it's been three days since the battle, and Harry doesn't look like Harry anymore. Maybe it's the way his eyes are struggling to focus, or how he's wrapped his arms around his narrow torso, or how it's only after Ron's remark that his face twitches a little.

It takes Ron forever to realise he's trying to smile.

"Are you feeling " better?", Ron asks.

Harry doesn't react.

"Yeah, no. Makes sense." He realises he's been tapping on the kitchen table with his fingers, and stops abruptly. "You hungry?"

Harry's head moves. It doesn't look very encouraging.

"You've got to eat _something_", Ron insists.

"I'm not _hungry", _Harry croaks; and Ron knows he should be worried (and he is " he's been worried every single goddamn second since they got here), but it's been so long since he's last heard that voice.

"How 'bout tea?", he asks. "Yeah. I'll make tea. C'mon. Sit down."

Harry lets him place his hands on his bony shoulders, and Ron guides him to the nearest chair. "Right. There you go."

"Ron?"

It's barely a whisper, and it's just one word " but it's not nothing, and it's so much better than silence.

"Yeah?"

"What " happened?"

"Oh, you just kind of saved the world", Ron says, in a pitiful attempt to crack a joke. "Y'know. The usual."

"Where's everyone?", Harry croaks. Maybe his hands aren't actually shaking, but they look like they are.

"Burrow", he says.

"Why aren't _we _at the Burrow, then?"

"We â€| " Ron breaks off. He tries to think of an answer less unsettling than the truth: And he thinks of his parents, and his siblings, and the look on Hermione's face when they said goodbye three days ago. The thought breaks his heart a little. "You just â€| you were in a pretty bad place, is all. We just thought it was best to â€| take you somewhere quiet â€" for now. Get you some space. So we brought you here, to Grimmauld Place."

"What about you?"

A million things come to Ron's mind. Number one, he hates Grimmauld Place.

Number two, he doesn't hate Harry.

"Well, someone's got to make sure you don't starve while you're here, right?" Ron glances at him over his shoulder: Harry's rested his forehead against his palms, elbows on the wooden tabletop, and his eyes are closed.

"You should be with your family", he says after a while.

Ron feels his stomach twist.

"Someone should be with you, too", he reminds Harry, just as the kettle starts to whistle.

Number three, he'll stay.

* * *

><p>Two.

You say that spiders crawled inside and made themselves a home

Where lions once were

- Twenty One Pilots

Harry, hisses a voice.

Fire, he thinks numbly.

There's so much fire.

Harry ... He's stumbling over jagged rocks and faces he's seen before â€" in a different life, when the world wasn't threatening to go up in flames â€" and there's blood dripping off his fingers

-

Harry. Harry.

He's going to make this right, he'll fix it this time - he won't be late again, he'll fix it, he'll fix it -

_Harry " _The voice cracks.

He can save them - if he just runs fast enough - if he could scream, he thinks, if he could just scream, if he could warn them -

"Harry! _HARRY!_"

He'll save them - he'll save them all -

"Harry, wake up, wake up!"

Harry's knees hit the floor. The grip around his shoulders loosens.

"Alright", says a voice above him,

"alright, you were dreaming, you - "

"They're dying - they're d-dying ... Ron, they - "

"Nobody's dying", Ron says. His face is ashen under his freckles. "You - it was just a dream, alright, you were dreaming, you're safe - "

"I need to - I need to f-fix this, I - "

"You're okay", Ron says, and his voice is quivering, just a little bit. "Everything's okay."

"But they're dying", Harry whispers, "they're dying, Ron, they - they're all - "

"They're not dying", Ron says. "Nobody's dying."

Harry reaches for Ron's outstretched hand and sits up. He feels cold sweat trickling down his back, and his hands are shaking when they let go of Ron's.

"Better?", Ron asks.

Harry doesn't answer. Then " "There was blood " there was blood on my hands, I - "

"You haven't got any blood on your hands", Ron says quietly. "Look."

He's right.

* * *

><p>The feeling of firewhisky burning in his throat is oddly relieving.<p>

Ron's gotten used to that over the past couple of days - to the dull, throbbing ache, and the all too welcome numbness that follows. It makes him forget the rest of the world for a little while.

Deep down he's known it was going to happen - that Harry was going to start blaming himself for what had happened at Hogwarts. Ron's known, and he's been expecting it, every day since they've arrived at Grimmauld Place - but he isn't ready, not one bit.

Steps on the tiled floor.

Ron spins around and finds Harry standing in the doorway - small, crouched. He looks miserable.

"Hi, mate", Ron says. "You alright?"

Harry nods without looking up. "I thought y- nevermind. I'll go -"

He turns around on staggering legs, and Ron's stomach leaps uncomfortably. "Are you cr-"

"No", Harry croaks, and then he's gone, and Ron is left with smothering silence and an empty bottle of firewhisky.

He tosses his glass in the sink. "Shit."

Harry's steps in the hallway fall silent.

"Harry?"

Ron stumbles out of the kitchen and finds Harry standing on the bottom step of the staircase, arms wrapped tightly around his torso. He's shaking.

"Hey, mate, are you - are you okay?"

Harry doesn't reply. When Ron takes a hesitant step towards him, raising his arms, he backs away. "'m fine."

It's odd, Ron thinks, how they've been friends for such a long time, and he can't recall a single time he's seen Harry cry. Sure, they've fought a war together, but they've never talked to each other the way they sometimes would with Hermione.

Hermione, he thinks. She'd know what to do.

"It's alright", Ron says, lowering his arm. "Alright. 's alright, I'm just trying to h-"

"I don't need you", Harry croaks, "alright, I -"

He pushes past Ron, stumbling towards the bathroom. Ron can hear him throw up.

A pang of despair twinges in his stomach, but he shoos it away and resides to the only comfort he knows: He turns on every light in the damn house, boils a fresh kettle of tea, and sits with Harry until they fall asleep over half-empty mugs.

* * *

><p>Three.

There is a dark place, but I'm not going there

No, no, not on my way

- Tom Rosenthal

It's been three weeks, and they're adjusting.

"Harry? You hungry?"

Ron briefly taps on Harry's bedroom door; and when he is met with silence, he lowers his hand and says: "We can have supper, if you want to."

Sometimes it's hard to tell where giving Harry the space he so desperately needs ends, and losing sight of him begins.

He knocks again. Nothing.

It's become part of their life at Grimmauld Place â€" that Harry's got time to react until Ron has knocked three times. Only then he opens the door himself. So he doesn't worry. Harry still doesn't sleep well, he reminds himself after he's knocked three times, and it wouldn't be the first time he's fallen asleep in the middle of the day. But when Ron turns the doorknob and finds Harry's door locked, his stomach leaps uncomfortably â€" like he's missed the last step of a staircase.

"Harry?"

No one replies. Ron stares at the closed door, trying and failing to gulp down the jolt of panic that's welling up inside of him.

"Harry. Open the door."

The dark, heavy wood quivers under Ron's fist, his caution forgotten. "Harry, open the _door!_"

Silence.

"If you don't come out right now, I'll knock it down, I swear it, Harry, I won't - "

"What are you _doing?_"

When he spins around, Harry is staring at him like he's gone mad.

Ron doesn't know whether to laugh or cry or punch him on the nose.

* * *

><p>"What was that?", asks Harry when they're sitting in the kitchen.<p>

Ron looks up from his plate. Harry hasn't looked this alert in

weeks.

"Nothing. Just got worried."

"What, did you think I was gonna top myself?"

"Something like that, yeah."

Harry pales.

"That was a joke!", says Ron quickly. "Just a joke, I â€" never mind. Sorry. Just don't - "

"No need to worry", Harry says, blinking.

"I'm just saying", Ron says, in a desperate attempt to lighten the mood, "you're the bloody boy who lived - the irony if you â€"

"Yeah", says Harry â€" his voice sounds defensive, and Ron searches for something â€" anything: for the twitching corner of a mouth, a little bit of life in Harry's eyes â€" but Harry lowers his head, and Ron knows he's fighting a losing battle.

They drop the subject.

* * *

><p>"Hey, Harry. Look who came to see you."<p>

"I came to see both of you", says Hermione, pushing past Ron. Ron grins and rolls his eyes as her gaze rests on the dirty dishes in the sink, and then she smiles and says: "Hi, Harry."

"Hi", says Harry. Ron throws him a glance over Hermione's shoulder, and he clears his throat and adds: "It's good to see you."

"Sit down", says Ron, tapping her on the shoulder. "Fancy a cuppa?"

"I'd love one." Hermione sits down on the chair opposite Harry, and Ron joins them as soon as the tea's ready. "Your parents told me to give you their love", says Hermione. "And everyone else, of course â€" we miss you a lot."

"We miss you too", says Ron, pouring tea into their mugs, although the tea hasn't quite finished brewing yet. "You'll tell them that, yeah?"

"Of course", says Hermione. "Now, tell me, how â€" how are you?"

"We're â€| we're okay, yeah", says Ron.

"Grand", Harry says dryly. Ron kicks his leg under the table.

"What?", Harry hisses. He slams his cup on the wooden table and storms off.

"Is everything alright?", Hermione asks in horror as Ron looks back and forth between her and the door.

"I â€" look, I'm sorry, Hermione, I dunno what's got â€" I'll be right back", he says, jumping. "Harry!"

He reaches Harry's bedroom door just in time to stop him from slamming it shut and comes to a stand, breathing heavily. "What the bloody hell is wrong with you?"

"What's wrong with _you?", _ Harry shouts. "Don't _lie _to her, she isn't daft - "

"She's just worried!", Ron snaps, and he's trying to lower his voice because he knows Hermione is standing at the foot of the staircase, listening. "She's just trying to help - you know how much she hates it, not being able to do anything."

"_You _decided to have her over! I didn't want to talk to her, I â€"

"Shut up", Ron says. "Don't say anything you'll regret."

"You'd know all about that", Harry says icily.

Hermione flinches when the thunderous sound of a door snapping shut echoes off the walls â€" Ron's almost reached her when Harry's voice calls from the first floor.

"Ron, I'm sorry."

"I know", Ron says, not turning around. "Tell Hermione, not me."

He hears a deep breath. "Hermione â€" "

"I know", she says quickly. "It's fine, Harry, don't worry."

"Ron?"

Ron swallows hard. "'s alright", he says finally.

"D'you mind if I - "

"You go."

Harry's door clicks shut quietly.

Hermione gives Ron a hesitant smile, anxiously shifting from one foot to another. "I'll â€| I'll just go, alright?"

Ron's stomach leaps uncomfortably. "No! I â€| look, I'm sorry Harry's an idiot." Hermione's eyebrow twitches. "No, alright, that's not fair. He's not an idiot. He's just not doing well, is all. But â€" he'll be fine. And I'll be fine, we'll â€" be fine, yeah? I mean â€" I'm trying, I'm - "

"You're doing your best", she says in a small voice.

"I just dunno â€| if that's enough."

"Your best is more than he could ever ask for", she says, and there's the faintest hint of a smile tugging at her lips. "But you don't have to do this on your own â€" you know that, don't you? I know you said you'd take care of him, but â€" someone should take care of you, too."

"I'm fine", he says, and it doesn't matter that she doesn't believe it, because he doesn't, either.

There's a brief pause.

"So", she says finally. "I'll get going."

"You'll stop by, won't you?", he asks as she's standing in the doorway, and he wonders if she knows he's asking her to stay â€" shouting from the top of his lungs that he needs her, that he's scared and lonely and desperate -

"Of course."

He realises he has no idea how things are between them. There's never been time to talk â€| about anything.

Then she takes a small step towards him, and all he can think about it how this kiss is nothing like the first. It's quick and fleeting and light as feather, and it's over before he has time to react.

The door clicks shut behind her. Ron blinks dazedly.

"Harry? Oi!"

After a few hesitant seconds, Harry's face appears at the head of the staircase. "Hey. I'm sorry. Really."

"Forget about it, mate. Really. 's fine."

Harry steps down the stairs, sitting next to Ron on the bottom step.

There's a short silence. Then, a long one.

"You love her, don't you?"

Ron feels his face flush. "Go to bed, kiddo."

* * *

><p>Four.

It's alright to shake

Even my hand does sometimes

- Ed Sheeran

"Okay. Alright. Sit down."

Harry drops on the velvety carpet, slowly catching his breath, and Ron sits down beside him, thinking for what feels like the thousandth

time that he's way too used to the exhaustion in Harry's eyes.

"It's not supposed to _feel _like this", Harry mutters after a long while.

"Oh, I dunno", Ron says softly, looking around the moonlit room. "I reckon this is exactly what it's supposed to feel like."

"I hate it. I hate it, I hate feeling like this" " " " " " "

"Feeling how?"

Harry looks down at his hands. "Numb."

"I wouldn't mind feeling numb."

"Yes, you would", Harry says in a dead voice.

"You're alright though, aren't you?"

"Yeah. I dunno. You?"

It's odd, Ron thinks, how a question that small and simple catches him so utterly off guard. He's spent so much time asking Harry exactly that " " spent so much time making sure Harry would be okay " " he's never had time to think about himself. In a way, he liked it better that way.

* * *

><p>"Harry? You asleep?"<p>

"No", comes Harry's muffled voice from the emerald sofa in the living room.

"Oh. Good. I wanted to " " shit, are you crying?"

"No - I'm fine. I'm good, thanks."

"Harry", Ron says, sitting down next to him, "are you okay?"

Harry lowers his head, and Ron sees weary eyes and shaking hands and a misery on Harry's face that he's forever tired of seeing. "I'm " " I'm sorry, Ron, I'm so sorry " " | " "

"Wh- oh." The realisation comes with a rapid, sinking feeling.

"Harry. Look, I " " bloody hell." The words on his tongue taste something like nausea and helplessness and every single goddamn night at Grimmauld Place. "Mate, we talked about this", and it doesn't matter that they never did, because they should've talked about it years ago, and Ron still hasn't found the right words.

"'m fine. Alright. Sorry. I'm okay."

Ron awkwardly pats his knee while Harry catches his breath.

"Tea?"

Harry's laughter sounds like he's choking. "Because tea fixes everything?"

"Because tea fixes absolutely _everything", _Ron says merrily, with such enthusiasm it makes Harry grin " and in what feels like an indefinable gap in time between one moment and the next, Ron feels like maybe, they're going to be okay.

"I'll pass", Harry mumbles. "What'd you want to talk about?"

"I " uh, nevermind."

"You want to go home. That's what it is, right?"

Ron blinks. "How - "

"C'mon. I'm not that daft."

Silence.

"You really miss them, don't you?", Harry asks.

Ron stares at his hands, and it hits him just how much he does " he suddenly finds it harder to breathe, like gravity had decided to weigh on his chest differently today. It's an oddly familiar ache " the kind of ache that clutches to his lungs as soon as he pays attention to it. With Harry to take care of, he's never had to pay attention.

The truth is, he does. He's missed them every single day since the battle, and sometimes he can't believe it's been an entire month.

And then sometimes, he can't believe it's been just a month.

"I " yeah. I just don't " I'm not sure if I " just yet."

For the first time, he's glad Hermione isn't around " he's grateful, somehow, that Harry lets him sit in silence as he struggles to retain his composure, and, instead of saying a thousand pointless things that wouldn't help anyway, just doesn't speak at all.

"On second thoughts", Harry says after a while, "tea is an excellent idea."

"No " it's fine, I can - "

"I'm not a baby, Ron", Harry says as he gets up. "And I make better tea than you, anyway", he adds quietly.

Ron rolls his eyes, and it eases the feeling of his heart pounding painfully in his chest (and it's odd how his heartbeat stings in a way that feels like Fred's name, he thinks), if just a little bit.

"You make awful tea", he grins.

Harry comes back a few minutes later, when the silence has almost stopped feeling like silence, and sits down next to him. Ron takes a careful sip, but Harry doesn't touch his mug. He puts his chin on his left knee, takes a deep breath, and then: "Me too."

"Huh?"

"Me too. I miss them. And â€¦ I think maybe we should, you know. Go home."

"I â€" wait, what?" That's unexpected â€" unexpected and wonderful and alarming all at once. "Because â€" if you don't â€" that's okay. We can stay. It's fine. I'm fine."

"No", Harry says, after a long pause. "I reckon it's about time."

"I kissed Hermione", Ron blurts out.

Harry closes his eyes. "I can't believe we're having this conversation."

"I mean, she kissed me, actually."

"Mate. I know. I was _there. _You two have awful timing, d'you know that?"

"Not th- She kissed me last _week._"

Harry mouth falls open. "Wait, where was _I_?"

"Upstairs. Sulking."

"I â€" oh. Sorry about that. Really, I - "

"Shut up. It's fine." Sip. Pause. "We don't have to go if you don't want to."

Harry watches as milk and tea mingle in his cup. "So â€¦ you and Hermione."

Ron's face goes scarlet. "Don't change the subject, you prick."

Harry chuckles weakly. And after a while, he mumbles: "I don't want to stay."

* * *

><p>Five.</p>

It's the first day of spring

And my life is starting over again

- Noah And The Whale

"Wait."

"Yeah?"

Harry shifts on his feet, and his eyes don't quite meet Ron's. "I just wanted to â€" thanks, yeah?"

"I didn't do anything", Ron says hastily.

"You did everything I could've asked for. And - much, much more than

that."

Now it's Ron's who looks down at his feet. "Anytime", he mumbles.
"Right. Let's go home."

Sunlight comes pouring into the narrow hallway when Ron opens the front door, and it feels like new beginnings and taking a deep breath and the first day of spring after a long, lonely winter.

When they step outside, Hermione is waiting for them.

"About time", she smiles.

End
file.